

NEWS RELEASE



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WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FEMA FRAUD FOLLOWING HURRICANE RITA

*May be sentenced to 10 years for filing false claim for
hurricane-related federal funds*

Feds continue “No Tolerance” for FEMA Fraud

LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced that MELISSA GIBSON, age 39, currently from Deridder, Louisiana, pled guilty to theft of public money, property, or records, before United States District Judge Patricia Minaldi.

GIBSON was indicted in October 2006 after investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation revealed that GIBSON submitted a false application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for federal disaster assistance following Hurricane Rita in September 2005.

According to the indictment, GIBSON received a treasury check in the amount of \$2,000 as a result of a false application she submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). On the

application, GIBSON claimed she evacuated from an acquaintance's home in Deridder, Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Rita. During the guilty plea today, GIBSON admitted that she did not leave the Deridder residence as a result of the hurricane and further acknowledged that she did not evacuate the Deridder area at all.

U.S. Attorney Washington stated, "This defendant lied on an application for hurricane relief funds and lined her own pockets with taxpayer funds to which she was not entitled. She deserves the full set of consequences of a federal criminal conviction. This office will continue to aggressively investigate and prosecute those who seek to fleece the American taxpayer."

Sentencing will be scheduled for a later date to be determined by the court. Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

When sentenced, GIBSON faces a maximum of ten years federal imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to three years following confinement.

To date, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana has charged 59 defendants with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and approximately 60 FEMA fraud investigations are currently on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John Luke Walker.

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